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## PLASTER CASTS

To the man who runs and reads plaster casts, their possibilities and use, their essentials, are mere sentimentalities; to him the cast is good if it is clean, without ridges and chips. We cannot blame this benighted person, for those who should know, unthinkingly demand little more. A cast is something more than a bit of composition molded and papered for smoothness. It is our fault that most of our casts are not more than this, because for so long—since the days of Rogers's groups—we have accepted these inadequacies. Our people have not yet come to realize that a plaster cast has a value outside of the material contained in it. I have been wondering whether a little insight into the matter of good cast-making would not greatly enhance its value. We think so little of processes, composition, time, and care, and look often so superficially at the finished thing.

There is an art in plaster reproductions which we scarcely recognize; it is something more than mechanical reduction—that is only the first step. The reproducer must know the masterpiece, every line and curve; he has to adjust details. And this he cannot and does not do properly unless he is well grounded in art, unless he knows its principles, unless he has a love for the thing he is doing, which gives him understanding and quick sympathy. This man has a great responsibility; he is to blame if the public is led astray by false lines and bad proportions, by glaring colors and faulty composition. It is unfortunate that until now this responsibility has not been felt, so that on all sides we are met with woeful imperfections. There is a cast which is the pride of many homes, not always a plaster reproduction, either—a bust of Beethoven, in ruff, bedecked with curls. Truly a wonderful creation—the temples sink in, the forehead is glossily smooth, the chin broad and material, the eyes those of an imbecile, and the hair curled in a manner to beggar description. The contour of the face, the formation of the skull, violate all laws of anatomy. It is our carelessness that is responsible for this sort of thing. Why should we not demand of our cast-makers as much as we ask of our picture copyists? Is it because just now we have awakened to the need of good pictures, and presently shall learn to demand good plaster casts?

Another thing we shall demand in the future is the copying of the great masterpieces of all times, not the fevered expression of a mob wild over the latest political, social, or naval victory, although we need these, too, if they are good. And when we have these reproductions of masterpieces, we shall want them done in the original

colorings—not in white or in ingenious browns, and glaring reds, to suit caprice, but just as we find them, the bronzes which have lain buried years and years, eaten away and discolored by the chemicals in the earth, the terra cottas, with their accumulations of time. Age has given these works of the geniuses of other days beauties not to be neglected; and the man who loves them and knows them plays a great part in art education by reproducing them as nearly as knowledge of chemicals and feeling for color and form will allow.

Of course, authentic casts, made with care, are more valuable than marbles or bronzes, not in material, but in what counts for more than that, in workmanship and understanding. Examine a good cast carefully; you see it has no seams (poor ones have none, either, for they have been merely papered off); but more than that, you see the tense muscle, the curve of the neck, the carelessly falling drapery, just as in the original work. Then this will be the end of this art (may we call it so?), to reproduce and preserve the works of great masters of all times for the enlightenment and education of the world.

Some such work and good is being done here, but so far our people have not shown much appreciation. There is so much that is poor, receiving, if not exactly appreciation, then encouragement. Just a glance of comparison—the one is of the cheapest plaster composition, quickly thrown together and set, with no thought of thorough hardening or drying, no idea of permanence (but this is a bit of wisdom born in ignorance, for who wants permanent mediocrity?); the other cast is reinforced with metal and linen fiber, to give it strength and firmness; then it is dried slowly in an even temperature; after the drying comes the hardening with acids and oils; the careful cutting is next done, detail work which requires knowledge and skill. That is the good cast.

A phase of this work is interesting, though not vital; it is the demand for this cast work for advertising, work which is done in accordance with lines of proportion and symmetry and with skill so far as the liberality of the advertiser allows. It is a hopeful sign, at all events, that this business side, practical though it is, recognizes the appeal good form makes to the people.

There are few who know of the really good work, and many who would appreciate and love it, were it brought to their notice. I believe that a little interest and feeling will do much toward discouraging the poor work and stimulating a good, intelligent sort of plaster-cast making.

EDNA HARRIS.